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ABSTRACT

A study compared the choices of Charlottesville area children with those from Children's Choice lists, published annually in "The Reading Teacher." Subjects, 62 third- to sixth-grade students, were interviewed before they checked books out of the Jefferson-Madison Regional Library Main Branch in Charlottesville, Virginia. Children were asked why they chose the books they did. The books on the 19 annual Children's Choice lists from 1975 to 1994 were analyzed by genre, and 12 categories were developed based on the analysis. The books selected by the children were recorded on a checklist. Results indicated that nonfiction informational books were the most frequently read books; contemporary realistic fiction was a distant second; and none of the Children's Choice lists were similar to the Charlottesville area children's selections across all of the categories. Results also indicated that the three most common reasons cited by the children for choosing the books were: (1) the book was exciting; (2) "you can learn something"; and (3) "it is fun." (Contains 22 references, 20 figures, and 4 tables of data.) (RS)

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ED 371 397

# WHAT ARE THEY READING?

# LITERATURE PREFERENCES OF CHARLOTTESVILLE AREA CHILDREN

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Lane M. Allison

April 26, 1994

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## WHAT SHOULD CHILDREN READ?

Parents, teachers, authors, librarians, religious leaders, editors of basals, and other adults have long been concerned with what children are reading. Many adults have been worried about the appropriateness of various existing literature for young audiences, and about the creation of books that they consider acceptable for children. Some other adults have been more concerned with what kinds of literature children enjoy reading. A few have attempted to write and/or make available books that they think children will be interested in reading. Unfortunately, most of these undeniably concerned, interested, caring adults forgot one essential element; they forgot to ask the children what they want to read, what they are interested in and enjoy reading, and what they actually are reading.

There are numerous national awards for excellence given to books by adults. Some of the best known are the Newbery Medal, for outstanding children's literature; the Caldecott Medal, for outstanding illustrations; the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award, for a lasting contribution to children's literature; The Boston Globe - Horn Book Awards, given for fiction or poetry, nonfiction, and illustration; and the Coretta Scott King Award, which notes excellence by African-American authors and illustrators. In addition, there are many state and regional awards, selected by both adults and children. There is, however, only one national award that is selected by children.

Children's Choices is a list of of the top one hundred books chosen from those submitted by publishers each year. Currently Children's Choices is an annual joint project of the International Reading Association and the Children's Book Council. Children's Choices has been published annually in The Reading Teacher , initially as an International Reading Association project called Classroom Choices, since 1975. This list is especially important simply because it is selected by children. It can be assumed that children are likely to be better judges of the literature that children will enjoy than adults, however well-meaning. Therefore, the Children's Choices lists are a valuable guide for teachers, librarians, parents, and other interested adults when considering literature for children.

The purpose of this study is threefold: to examine the past lists of Children's Choice books and to categorize them according to genre; to survey children in the Charlottesville, Virginia area about their literature preferences using categories from the Children's Choice lists; and to compare the choices of Charlottesville children with those from the Children's Choices lists. It is hoped that this comparison will provide information about the kinds of literature that children prefer to read, which can then be used by teachers, librarians, parents, and others when selecting books for children.

It is hypothesized that the types of books selected by children in the Charlottesville area will be similar to those chosen through Children's Choices. While each of the Children's Choices lists contains only books published within a single year, the Charlottesville area children had no such restrictions on their choices. It is, therefore, also expected that more similarity will be found between the selections of Charlottesville area

children and an average of the nineteen lists of Children's Choices than between the Charlottesville selections and any single annual list of Children's Choices.

Each of the following sections focuses on one aspect of the study. The literature review discusses in more detail how other awards given for children's literature are selected. In addition, these award selection processes are compared to the process used to select the Children's Choices lists. The next section looks at the design of the survey of the Charlottesville area children, and examines choices made regarding the survey by the investigator. The results of the Charlottesville survey are presented in the next section. This analysis of results includes a quantitative examination of the types of literature selected by the children in the Charlottesville area, comparisons between the Children's Choices lists and the selections of the Charlottesville area children, and some qualitative statements by the Charlottesville children about their selections. In the discussion, the results are examined further, and conclusions and inferences are presented.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There are countless awards given to children's books on an annual or semiannual basis. Many are national awards of excellence given to books by adults. In addition, there are numerous state and regional awards, selected by both adults and children. While it is not possible to discuss all of the awards given to children's literature in the United States, this section will examine the selection process of several awards in each of the following categories: national, adult-selected awards; state and regional, adult-selected awards; and state and regional, child-selected awards. Finally, the method of selection in the only national, child-selected award, the Children's Choices list, will be discussed.

### National, Adult-Selected Awards

National, adult-selected awards comprise the majority of those given for children's literature. Some of the awards recognize achievement in a specific genre or in a particular content area. Others are chosen for general excellence. Several national, adult-selected awards will be discused briefly. The discussion is intended to reflect both the well-known and prestigious, and also the lesser-known national, adult-selected awards.

The most recognized - and most prestigious - awards for children's literature are the John Newbery Medal and the Caldecott Medal. The Newbery Medal was named for John Newbery, an eighteenth century publisher and bookseller who was the first to publish books intended just

for children (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1979). Since 1922, it has been given annually to "the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children" (Peterson & Solt, 1982). The highly regarded runners-up are called Newbery Honor Books.

The Caldecott Medal, which honors noted nineteenth century illustrator of children's books Randolph Caldecott, has been awarded annually since 1938 (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1979). The medal and several honors are awarded by a committee to "the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children" (Peterson & Solt, 1982).

Another prestigious award is the Boston Globe - Horn Book Award. From 1966 to 1975, one award was given in each of two categories: Original Fiction/Poetry and Illustrations. In 1976, the category Prose/Nonfiction was added. Each year publishers submit up to three books in each category. Like the Newbery and the Caldecott, honor books are selected for each category (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

The Carter G. Woodson Book Award, named for the educator and historian, is sponsored by the National Council for the Social Studies. This award was established in 1974, and is presented annually to a nonfiction, trade book which deals realistically and sensitively with a topic related to minorities and race relations (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

In 1969 the Coretta Scott King Book Award was established to honor the memory and work of Dr. Martin Luthur King, Jr. and the courage and determination of his wife, Coretta. It has been an official American Library Association award since 1982. Seven librarians comprise the committee which selects an African-American author and illustrator each year whose work of fiction or nonfiction "contributes to the realization of the American Dream for all people" (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

The winner of the George C. Stone Center for Children's Book Recognition of Merit Award is chosen by a committee which considers the recommendations of elementary and secondary students, teachers, librarians, and university professors. This award was established in 1965, and has been given each year to a fiction or nonfiction children's or young adult book of high artistic quality which can be used effectively in the classroom (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

The Janusz Korczak Literary Award for Children's Books honors Dr. Janus Korczak, who founded two orphanages, one for Jewish children, the other for Catholic children, in Warsaw during World War II. Because he refused to turn the orphans over to the Nazis, Dr. Korczak was sent to a concentration camp, where he was killed. The award is intended to "make his nobility, wisdom, idealism, and self-sacrifice meaningful and inspirational for future generations" (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993). Literature in the children's category may be fiction or nonfiction, and a winner is chosen for general excellence by a committee of scholars, editors, literary critics, and educators (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

State and Regional, Adult-Selected Awards

There are far fewer adult-selected, state or regional children's literature awards than either national, adult-selected awards or state and regional, child-selected awards. Most of the state and regional, adult-selected awards require that the author live in the state, and/or that the book be about the state. Several state and regional, adult-selected books will be discussed briefly.

Since 1990, the Lupine Award has been given annually to an outstanding book written or illustrated by a Maine resident, or about the

state of Maine. The Lupine Award was created by the Children's and Young Adult Services Section of the Maine Library Association. It is chosen by a committee consisting of two children's librarians from each district of the Maine Library Association and the current and past presidents of the Children's and Youth Services Section (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

The Alabama Author's Award added an annual children's award in 1983. It is sponsored by the Alabama Library Association, and is designed to honor authors who were born in Alabama, or have lived in the state for at least five years. The book selected to win the Alabama Author's Award must "be of lasting value to the world of literature" (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

The Carolyn W. Field Award has been sponsored annually since 1984 by the Youth Services of the Pennsylvania Library Association. The selection committee includes members of the Youth Services Division. The committee chooses an exemplary work by a Pennsylvania author and/or illustrator to receive the award based on a set of criteria including uniqueness, value to the intended audience, and value of the work as literature (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

The Penn Center U.S.A. West Children's Literature Award is given annually to an author living west of the Mississippi River. It was established in 1983 by the Penn Center U.S.A. West Writer's group. A selection committee of three people, who are either publishers, book sellers, or librarians choose the winner from a master list (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

In order to be eligible to win the Friends of American Writer's Award, an author must be at least a five-year resident, or have been born

in one of the following states: Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, or Wisconsin. The Friends of American Writers Award was created in 1960 and is awarded annually to an excellent work of children's or young adult fiction or nonfiction (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

State and Regional, Child-Selected Awards

Many states have some sort of child-selected children's literature award. Restrictions on the subject of the book and the home of the author are much more rare than those placed on the adult-selected state and regional awards. Although all of these awards are ultimately selected by students, the list from which the children vote is created in many different ways. The awards discussed show the wide variety of methods used to determine the master list from which the children vote.

The Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award, the second oldest child-selected award in the country, has been awarded annually since 1957. It was created to honor Vermont author Dorothy Canfield Fisher. Thirty titles are chosen for a master list by a six member committee including the Children's Services Consultant from the Vermont Department of Libraries, members of the Vermont Parent-Teacher Association, and the School Library/Media Consultant from the State Department of Education. Vermont students in fourth through eighth grade who have read some or all of the books on the list vote for the winner (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

In 1989 the Puffin Award was established in Alaska to encourage second and third grade readers to read chapter books. Fifteen books are selected for a list by a committee of librarians. A second or third grade

Alaskan student is eligible to vote for a favorite book when he or she has read at least five of the fifteen books on the list (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

The William Allen White Children's Book Award has been presented annually since 1952. Its purpose is to encourage children of the state of Kansas to enjoy reading. A book selection committee compiles a master list of books published within the last calendar year. The committee includes members of educational institutions and professional organizations in Kansas. Kansas students in fourth to eighth grade who have read some or all of the books on the master list vote for one favorite (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

The Virginia State Reading Association established the Young Reader Award of the State of Virginia during the 1985-86 school year. One award is given annually in each of four categories: primary, elementary, middle, and high school. Nominations for inclusion on the master lists are given by Virginia students, teachers, and librarians. The Virginia State Reading Association Young Readers Book Selection Committee then compiles a master list of ten books for each category. Students must have read, or have had read to them, at least five books from their level's master list (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

The Arizona Young Reader's Award is unique in that the students of the state not only nominate books for the master list, but they also compile the nominations into a master list of twenty books. Students who have read, or had read to them, at least five of the twenty books may vote for the winner. The award, created in 1977, is given biannually. It is sponsored by the Departments of Elementary Education of the University of Arizona and Arizona State University (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

Indiana's Young Hoosier Book Award was established in 1975 by the Indiana Media educators. Books are nominated by students, teachers, and librarians. From these nominations two master lists of twenty books are created by an adult committee. One list is for grades four to six, and the other grades six to eight. Students who wish to vote for one favorite must have read at least three of the twenty books on the master list (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

The Pacific Northwest Library Association has presented its Young Reader's Choice Award each year since 1940. Teachers and librarians in Alaska, Alberta, British Colombia, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington nominate books for inclusion on a master list. Fourth through eighth grade students in these states and provinces who have read at least two of the nominated books may vote (Criscoe & Lanasa, 1993).

National, Child-Selected Award

Children's Choices, which began as Classroom Choices, is the only national, child-selected award. Children's Choices represents the top one hundred books chosen by children from those published the previous year. Although the list has been published annually since 1975, the manner of choosing the books that will appear on the list has changed somewhat over the years.

The original Classroom Choices lists were compiled by five teams from different regions of the country. Each team consisted of a university children's literature specialist, a local supervisor, and classroom teachers and students. The books from which the list was compiled were chosen by the teams. The teachers took those books to their classrooms. They were used in instruction and/or made available to the students. The teachers

observed the students' reactions to the books and kept anecdotal records. The teams then met and compared notes. A final list, the Classroom Choices, was compiled (Classroom Choices, 1975).

Today, Children's Choices lists are compiled in a slightly different manner. The five teams consist of a children's literature specialist and one or more classroom teachers, who then work with other teachers in their area, as well as with the children. The local supervisor of the past has been replaced by a classroom teacher who acts as a link between the specialist and the other classroom teachers and the children. The books used in the classrooms, however, are now submitted by publishers rather than being selected by the teams. The books continue to used in classroom instruction and/or are made available for the children to read. The teachers still observe students' responses to the books and keep anecdotal records. These records include the students' choices of favorites. Those votes are counted from the five regions, and the top one hundred books chosen are placed on the Children's Choices List for that year (Children's Choices, 1993).

Although many states and regions have prestigious child-selected awards, Children's Choices is the only national child-selected award for children's literature. The Children's Choices list provides teachers, librarians, parents, and other adults with a guide to new children's books that have been selected by children as the best of the year.

## DESIGN OF THE STUDY

### Sample

The age group focused upon in this study includes third- to sixth-grade students. The sample of sixty-two students includes the following: sixteen third-grade students; twelve fourth-grade students; fifteen fifth-grade students; and nineteen sixth-grade students. Thirty-four of the students are male, and twenty-eight are female.

Both sexes, all races, and as wide ranging interests, intellectual levels, and backgrounds as possible were desired. There were several options available for determining what third to sixth grade students in the Charlottesville area choose to read.

The decision to use the public library rather than school libraries was made knowing that either would likely have confounding problems. Many students feel that they are expected to take out a library book during their library period. This may lead a student to pick a book randomly, with little thought given to the content. Students may be influenced by friends and/or teachers in selecting books rather than relying on their own judgement or interests. In addition, in at least one local school, all of the award-winning books are marked with a star, and the students are encouraged by the librarian and the teachers to choose these books. Since the Children's Choice found that few award-winning books were chosen as

favorites, using school libraries that employ such a system would likely have skewed results.

Using public library patrons as subjects also has its problems, however. The biggest issue is that in order for a child to be at the public library, the child must want to be there - or the parent must want the child to be there. It is also necessary to have someone who is willing and able to get the student to the library. Once parents are involved, there is the possibility of parent influence. During observations, however, it seemed that most often the children were left in the children's room to make their own selections while the parent did the same in the adult area. It was determined that the public library offered fewer restrictions in book selection, fewer potential influences from other people, and the potential for greater diversity of children, including those who are home-schooled, than the public school libraries, so the interviews were conducted at the main branch of the Jefferson-Madison Regional Library.

The Jefferson-Madison Regional Library Main Branch and Northside Branch were initially chosen as the sights for the interviews. However, after spending time at the Main Branch, it was determined that there would be no need to go to the Northside Branch. The reasons for this decision include the following: the Main Branch is open, and frequented by children, on Sundays; and the Main Branch is located in an area that is frequented by diverse populations, which allowed for a representative sample without the necessity of conducting interviews at the Northside Branch.

Measure

The measure used was a checklist consisting of categories derived by the investigator from the Children's Choice lists. The categories used were as follows: contemporary realistic fiction, folk/fairy tales, historical fiction, mystery, suspense/ghost, fantasy/science fiction, sports, poetry, biography/autobiography, information, movie, and humor.

Method

At the Main Branch of the Jefferson-Madison Regional Library, a table was placed in an open area between the main door and the children's room. A large, sign, which said "What are you reading?" was hung from the table. The investigator sat at the table with a tape recorder and list of categories determined from the investigation of the Children's Choice book lists.

The initial intention was for the child to stop at the table on the way to the circulation desk to check out his or her books. The child would show the investigator the books and explain why he or she had chosen these particular books. Tally marks would be made on the checklist by the investigator for each book chosen, and the student's reasons for choosing each book would be tape recorded. The child would be prompted as necessary to determine his or her grade level and reasons for the book selection. It was soon discovered, however, that many of the children were gathering books for school reports. (These books were included only if the student expressed some real interest in them - that is, they might have chosen them even if it were not for the report.) Because they were not necessarily choosing the books they had for enjoyment, these students were then asked about their favorite books. Some children responded

with titles, others with genre. They also explained why these books were favorites. This combination approach seemed to increase the children's willingness to discuss the books they enjoyed reading, and was utilized subsequently with all students who stopped at the table.

Each book a child chose or named was placed into only one category. If a book could be logically placed into two categories, the reason for choosing the book was used to determine its placement. For example, one student had chosen a biography of Jackie Robinson. This book could fit into either the sports category or the biography category. His reason for choosing this book was, "I like baseball, and it is interesting to see how the game used to be that is different from today." The book was placed in the sports category. If he had responded that he enjoyed learning about people, or that Jackie Robinson was an important person to know about because he broke the color barrier, the book would have been placed into the biography/autobiography category.

## RESULTS

The books on the nineteen Children's Choices lists were analyzed by genre. Twelve categories were developed based on the analysis: contemporary realistic fiction, folk/fairy tales, historical fiction, mystery, suspense/ghost, fantasy/science fiction, sports, poetry, biography/ autobiography, information, movie, and humor. The books selected by the Charlottesville area children were recorded on a checklist also consisting of the above categories.

In Charlottesville, sixty-two children reported a total of eighty-seven books and kinds of literature. Table 1 shows the distribution of those eighty-seven books across the categories developed from the Children's Choices lists.

In order to facilitate comparison between the Charlottesville and Children's Choices lists, the actual number of books in each category was changed to a percentage of total books chosen. Percentages were calculated for each year of Children's Choices, as well as an average of all nineteen years across each category. Figures 1 - 19 each show the comparison of the percent of books chosen per category by the Charlottesville area children and one year of the Children's Choices lists. Figure 20 represents a comparison of the average of all Children's Choices lists by category with the choices of the Charlottesville area children.

Table 1 - Books Chosen by Charlottesville Area Children

| Category | Number of Books |
|---|---|
| Contemporary Realistic Fiction | 12 |
| Folk/Fairy Tales | 4 |
| Historical Fiction | 7 |
| Mystery | 7 |
| Suspense/Ghost | 4 |
| Fantasy/Science Fiction | 5 |
| Sports | 6 |
| Poetry | 1 |
| Biography/Autobiography | 9 |
| Information | 25 |
| Movie | 0 |
| Humor | 7 |

Figure 1: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category Charlottesville 1994 and Classroom Choices 1975

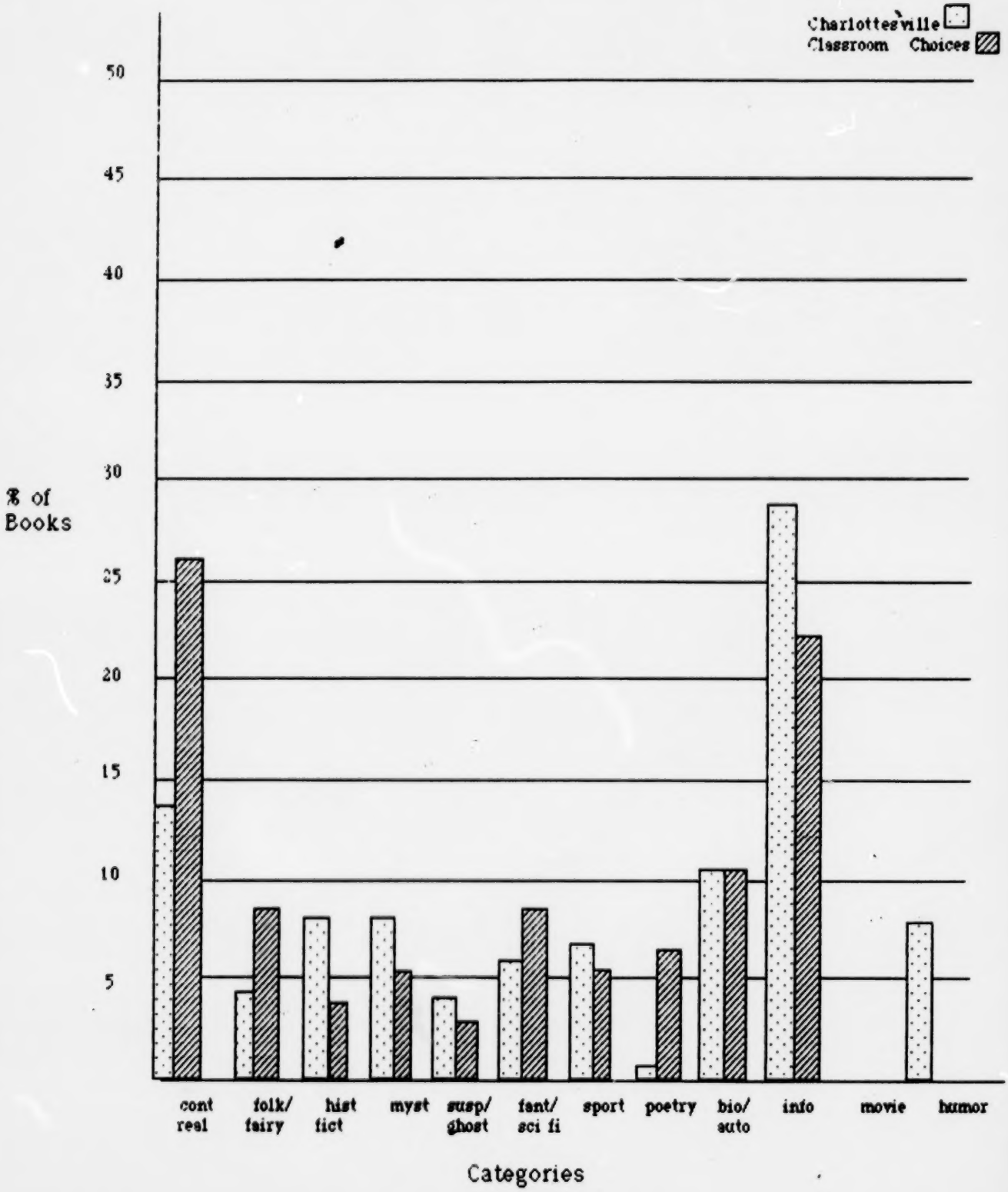


Figure 2: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category
Charlottesville 1994 and Classroom Choices 1976

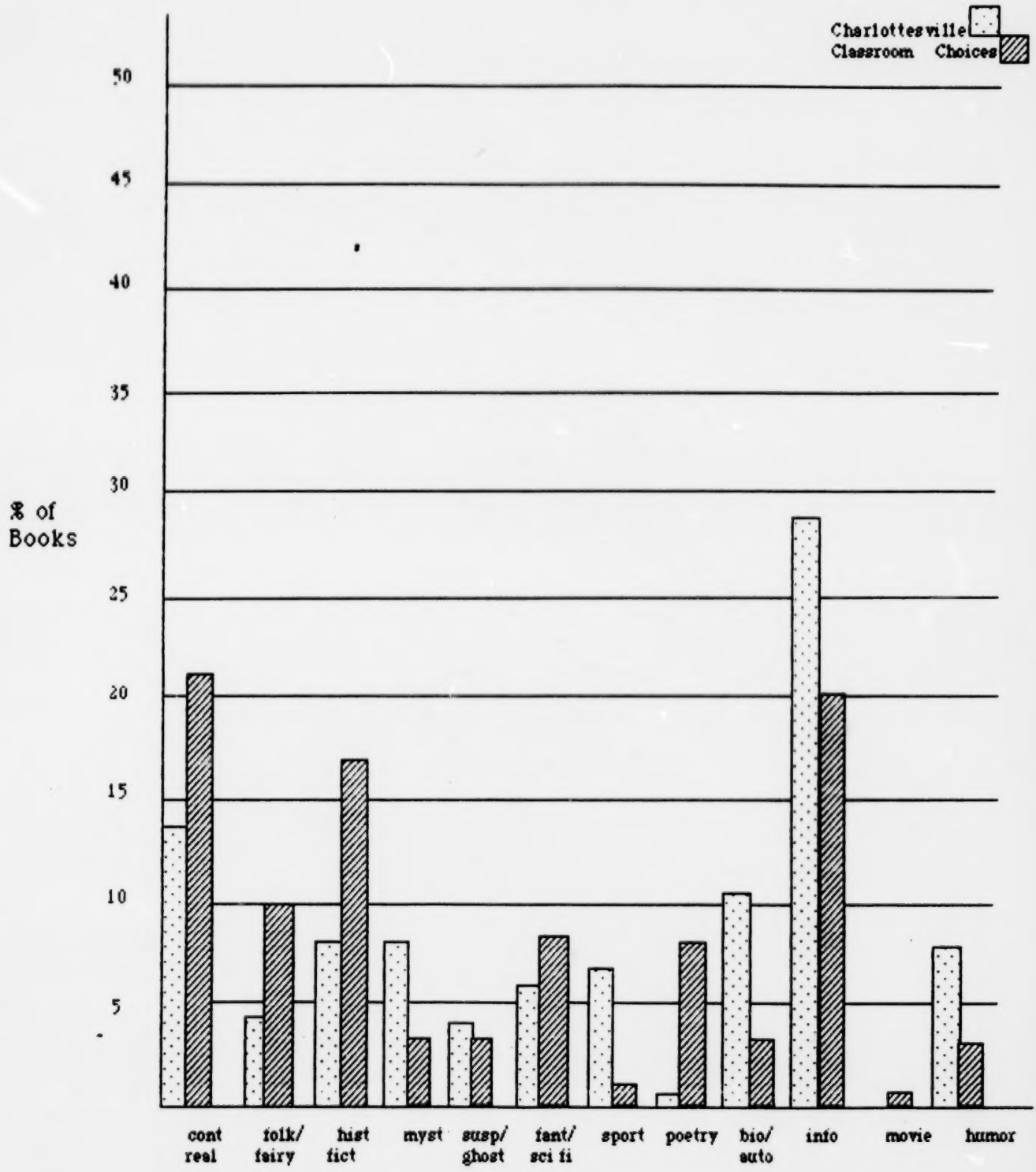


Figure 3: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category
Charlottesville 1994 and Classroom Choices 1977

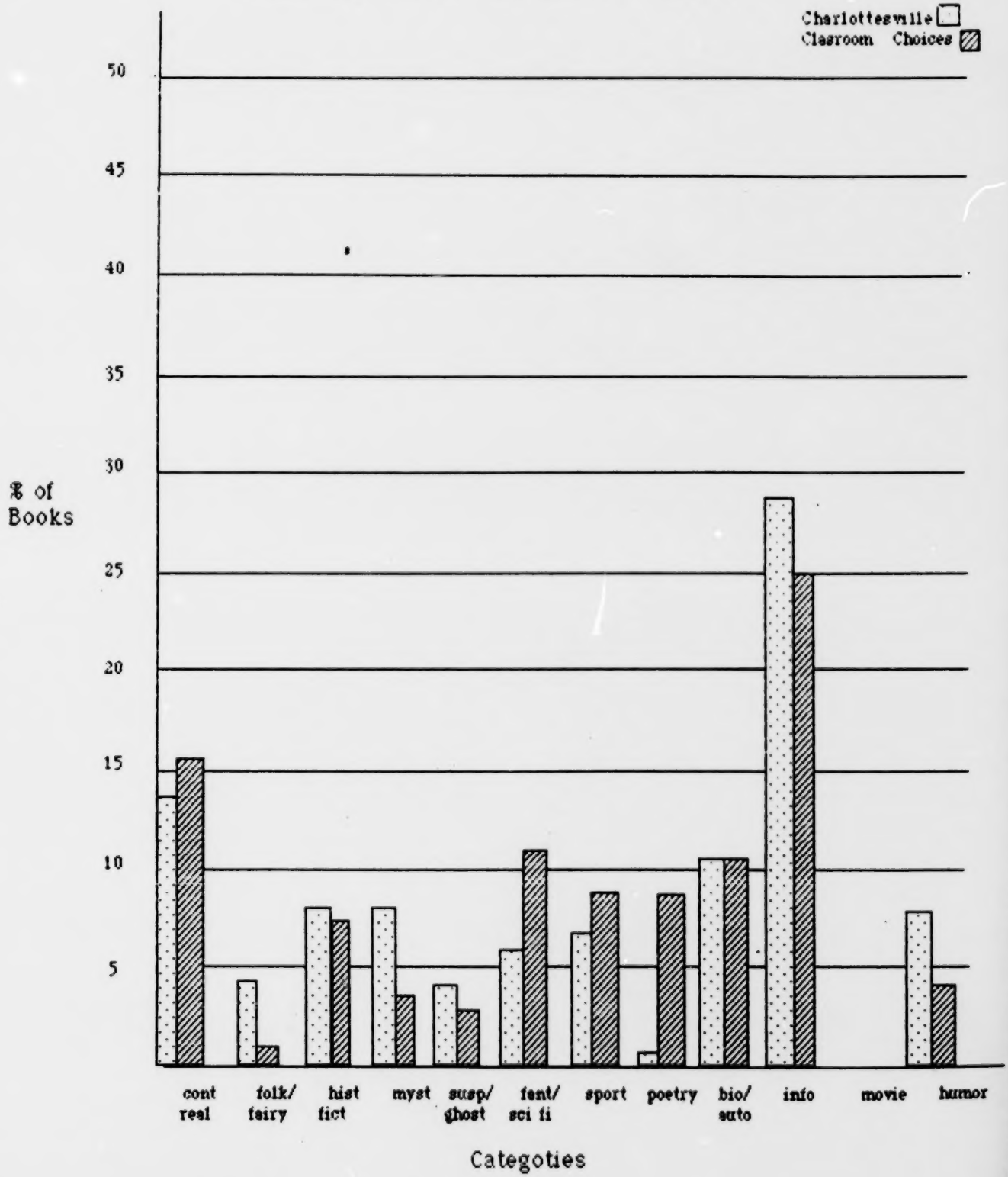


Figure 4: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category Charlottesville 1994 and Classroom Choices 1978

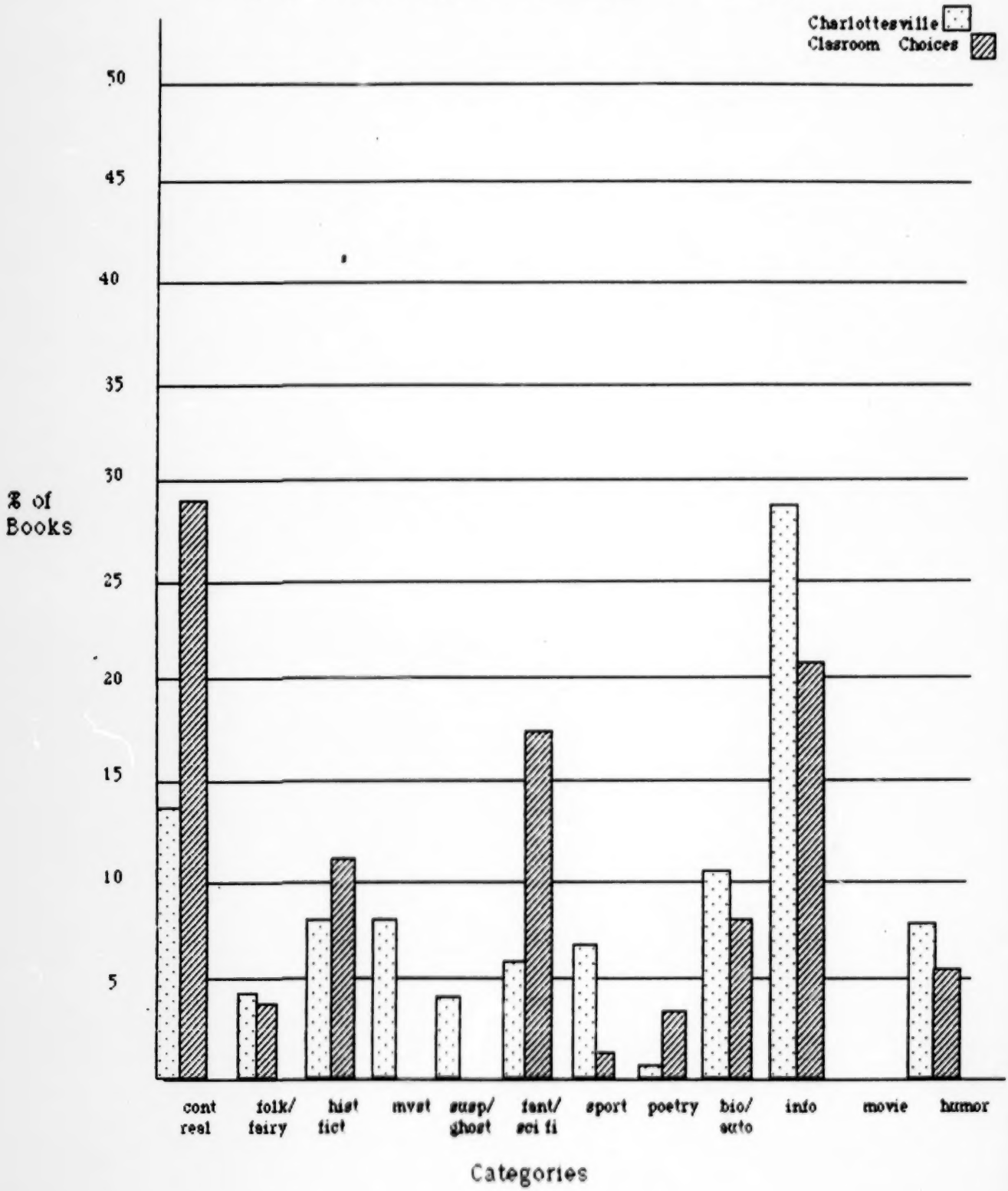


Figure 5: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category Charlottesville 1994 and Children's Choices 1979

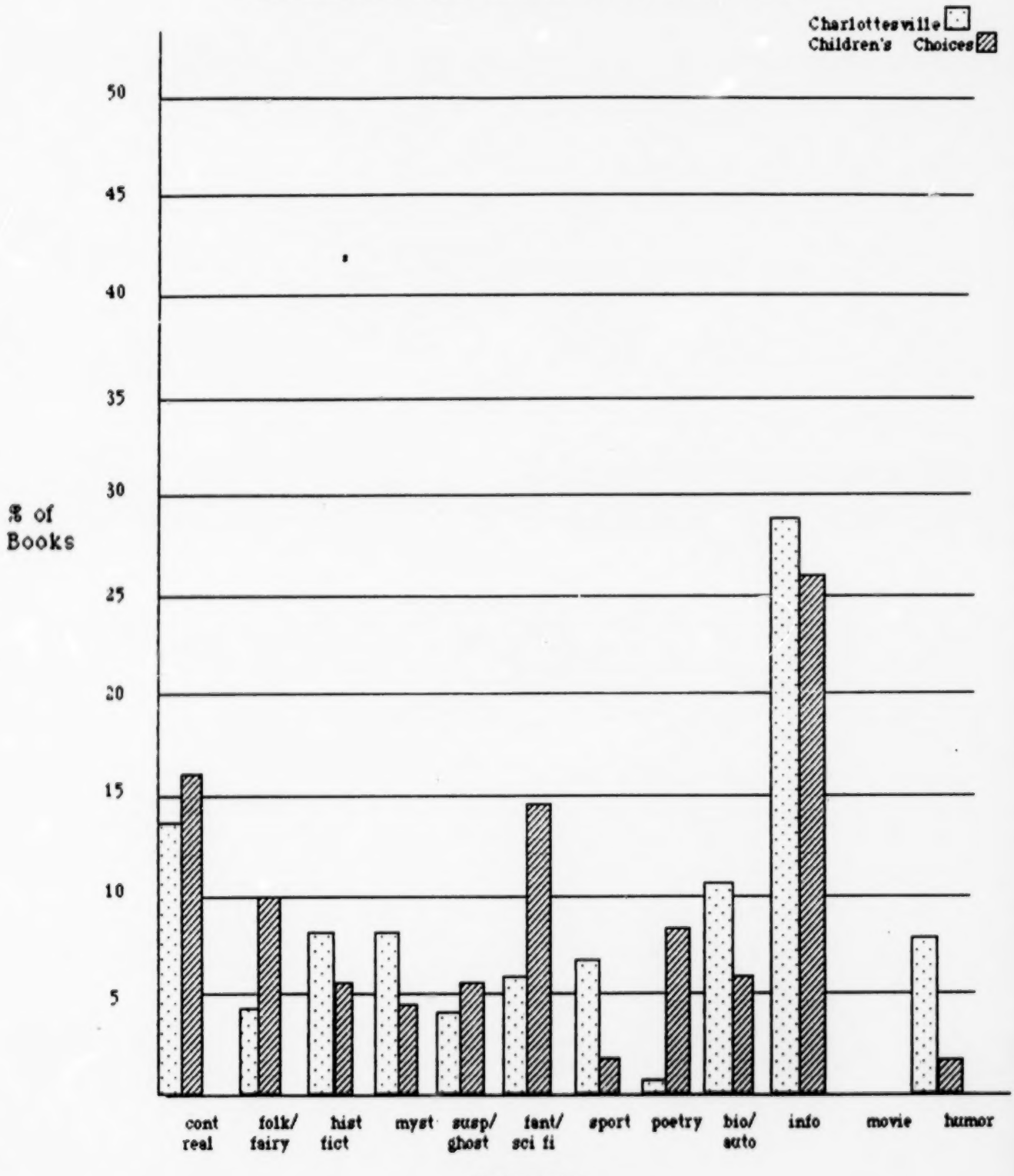


Figure 6: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category
Charlottesville 1994 and Children's Choices 1980

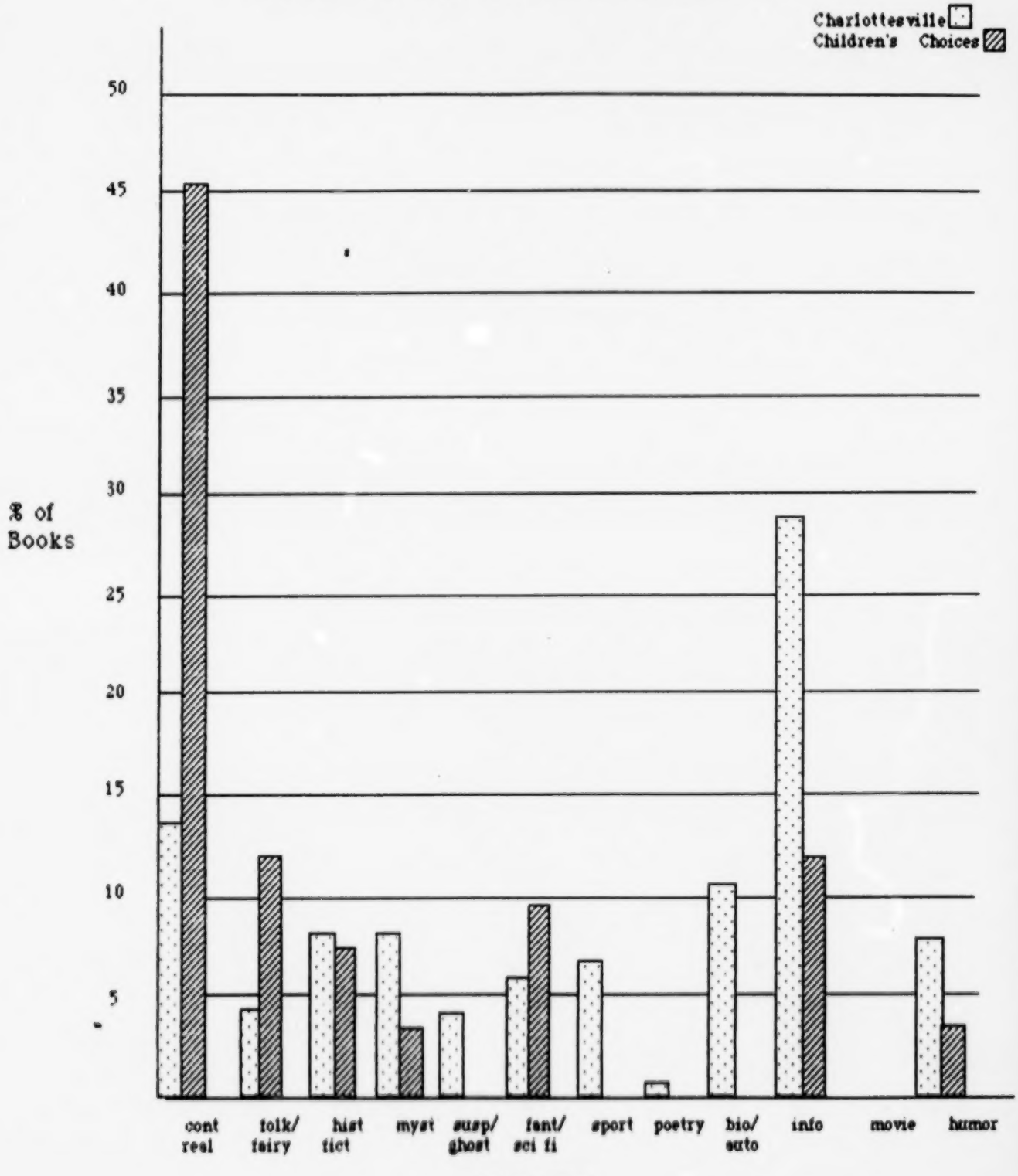


Figure 7: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category Charlottesville 1994 and Children's Choices 1981

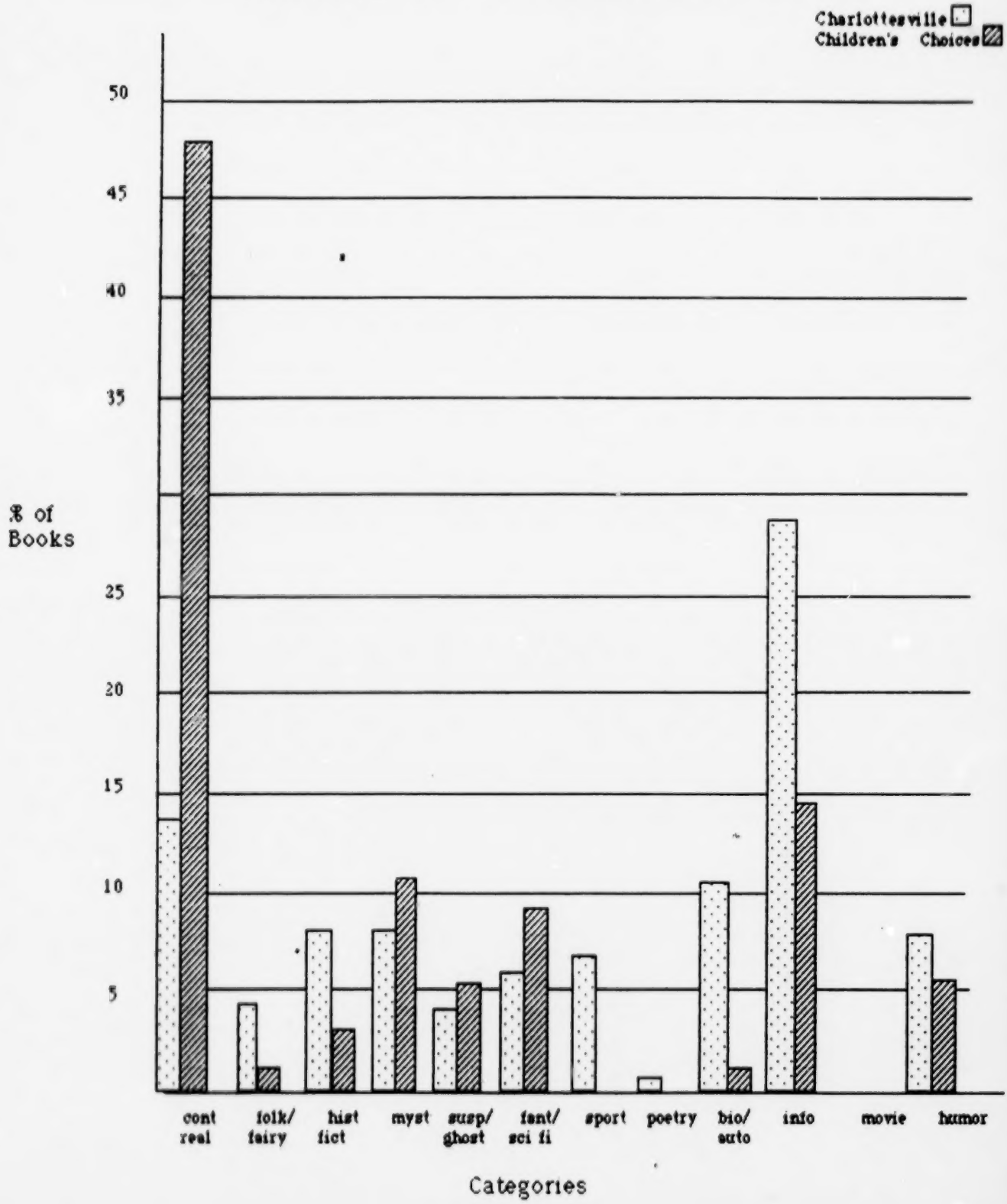


Figure 8 Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category
Charlottesville 1994 and Children's Choices 1982

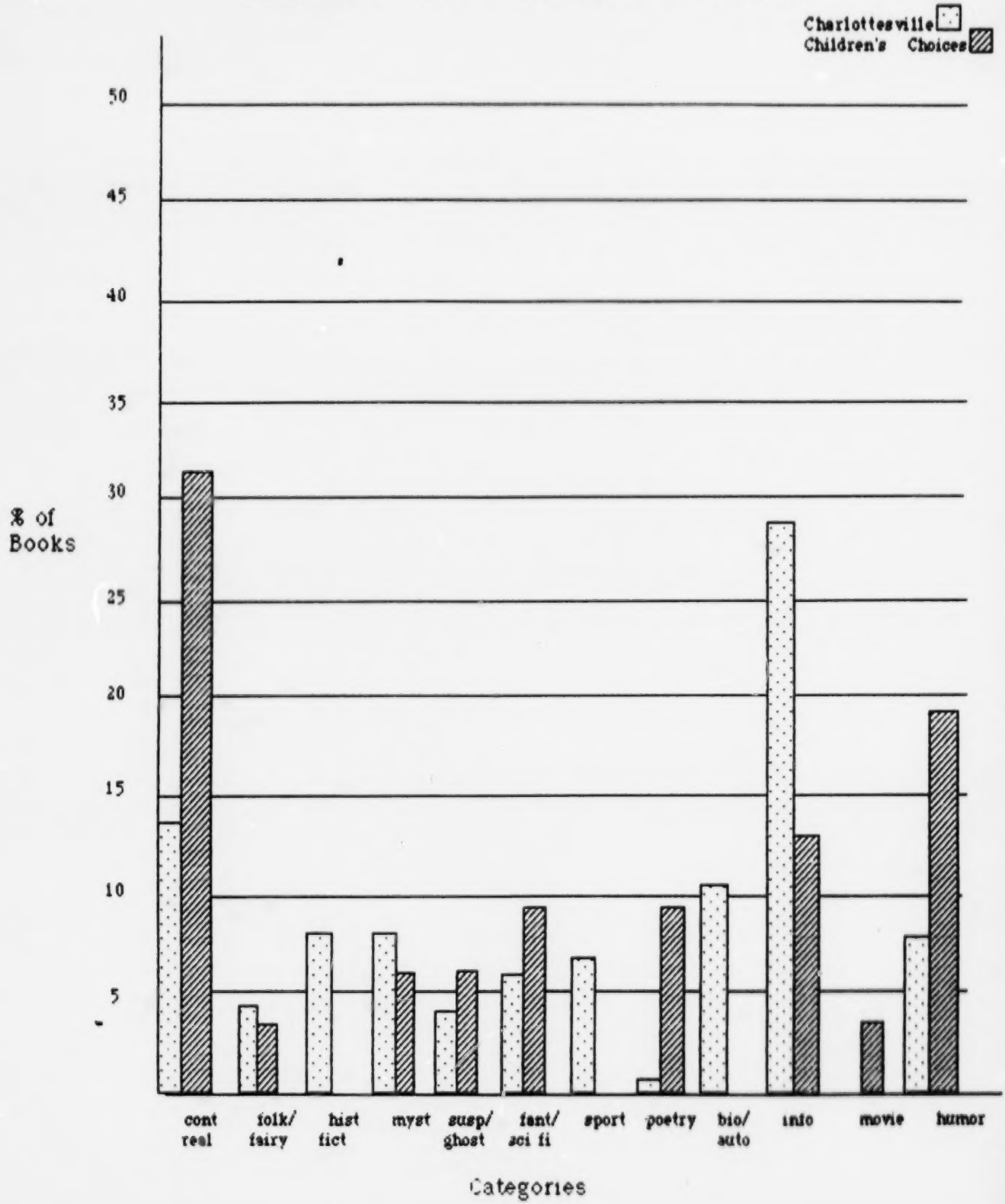


Figure 9: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category
Charlottesville 1994 and Children's Choices 1983

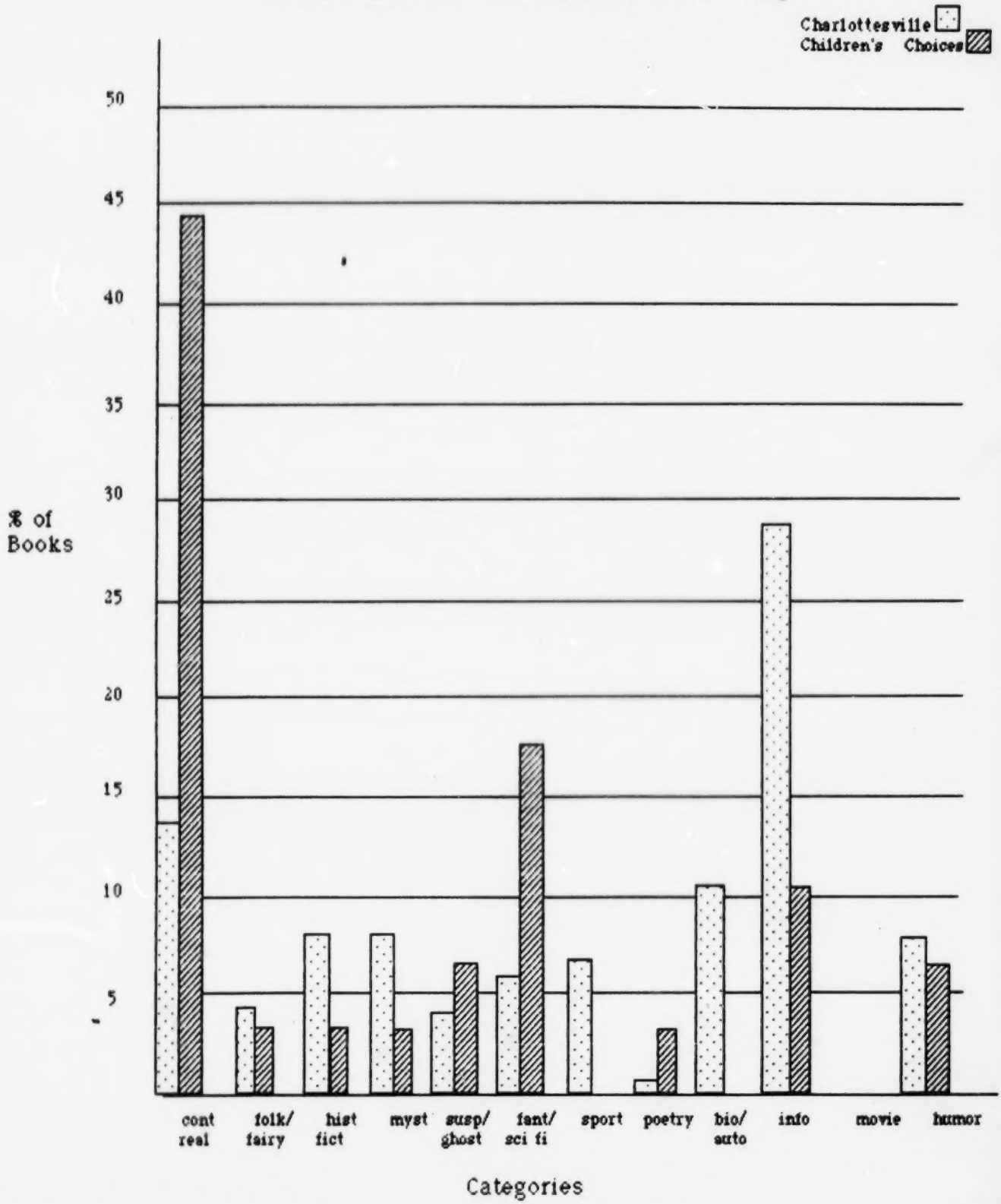


Figure 10: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category Charlottesville 1994 and Children's Choices 1984

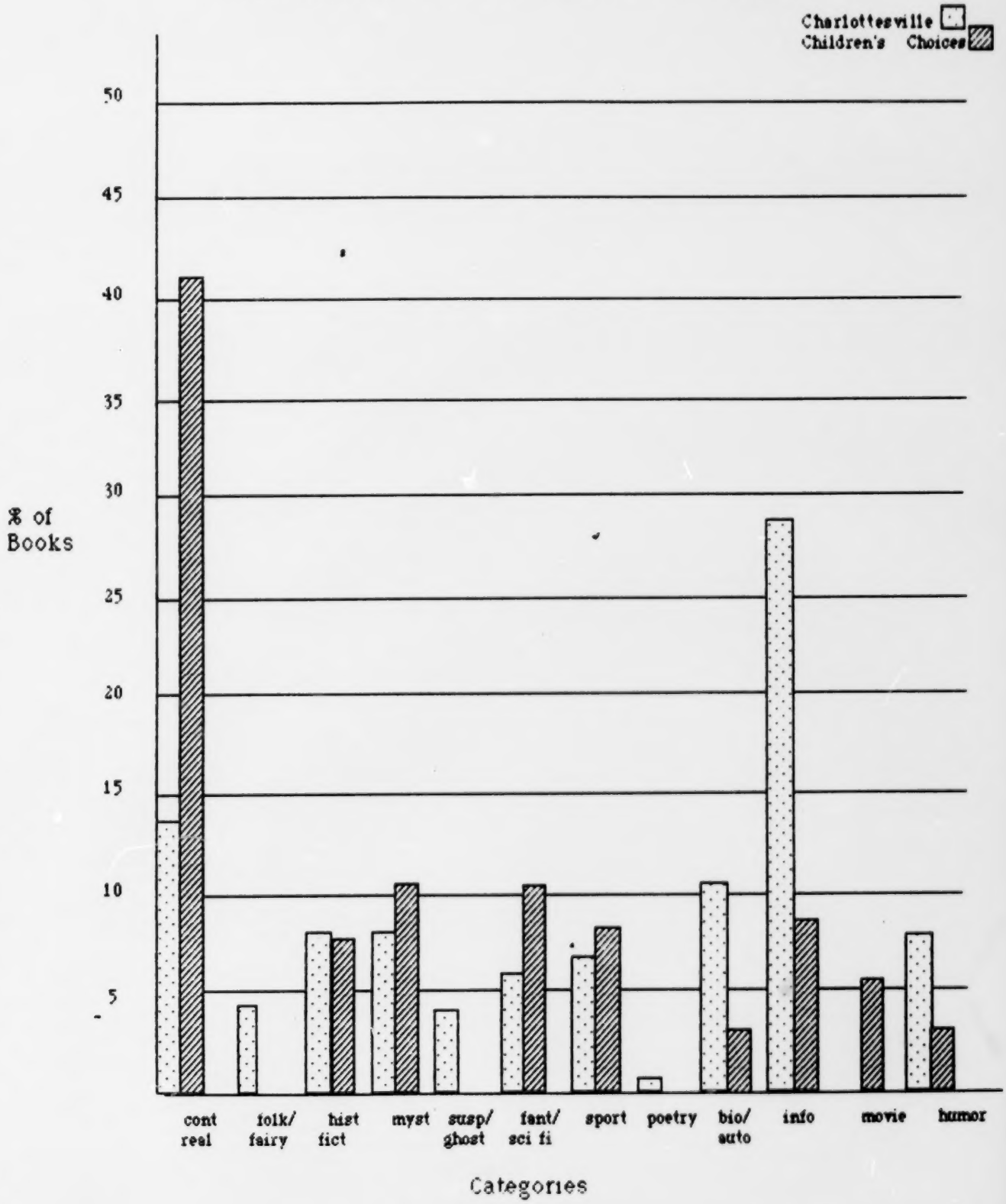


Figure 11: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category Charlottesville 1994 and Children's Choices 1985

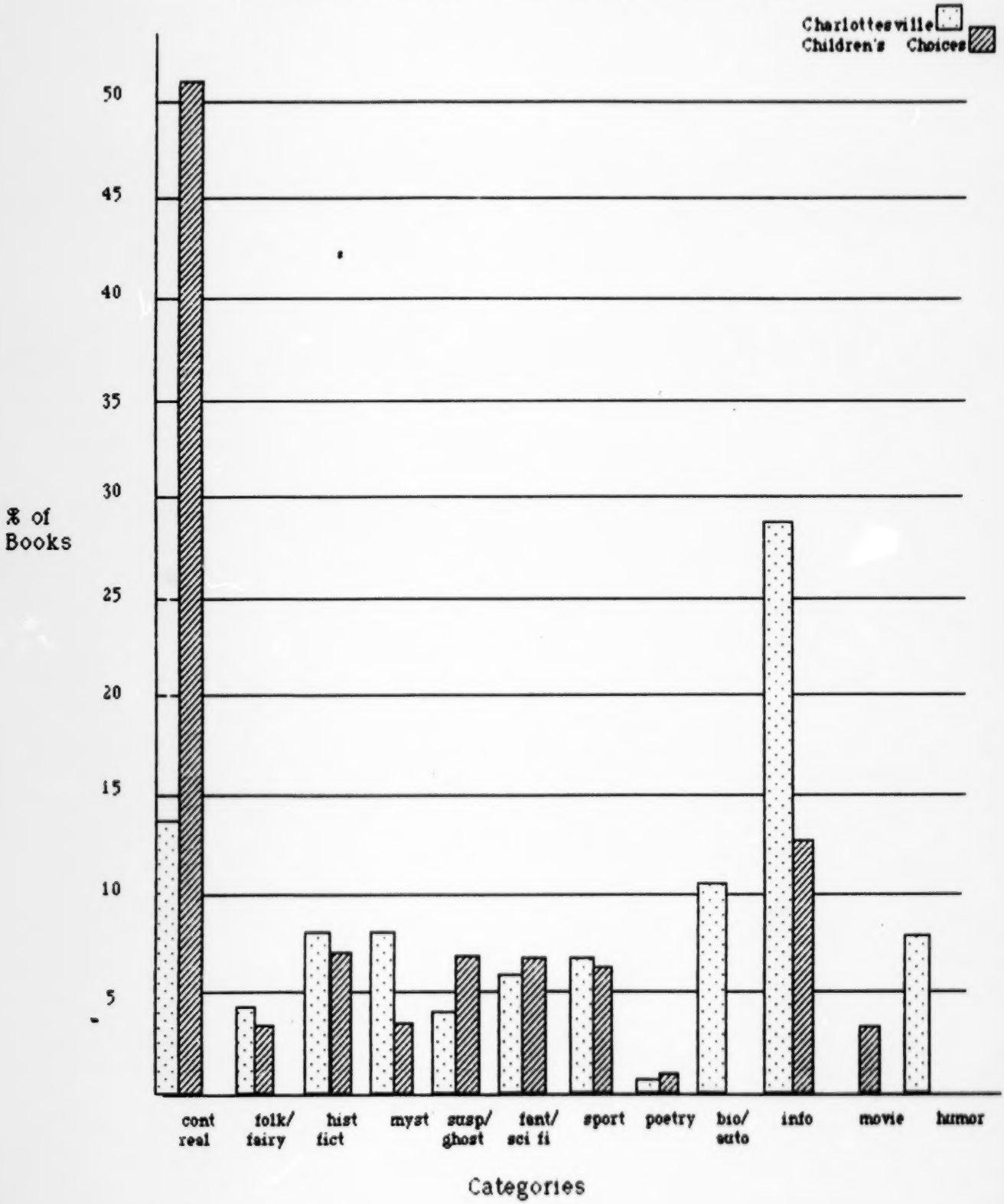


Figure 12: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category
Charlottesville 1994 and Children's Choices 1986

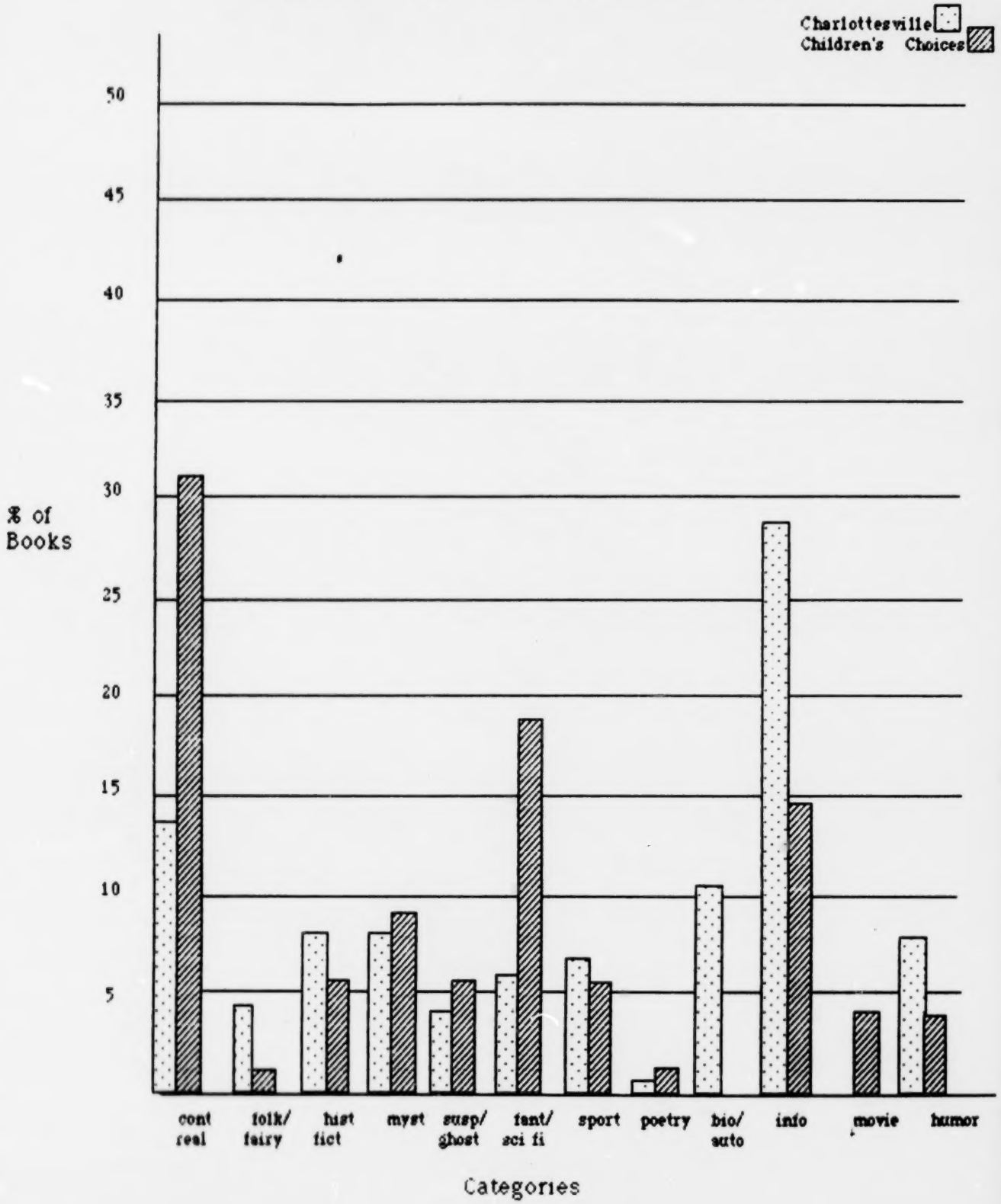


Figure 13: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category Charlottesville 1994 and Children's Choices 1987

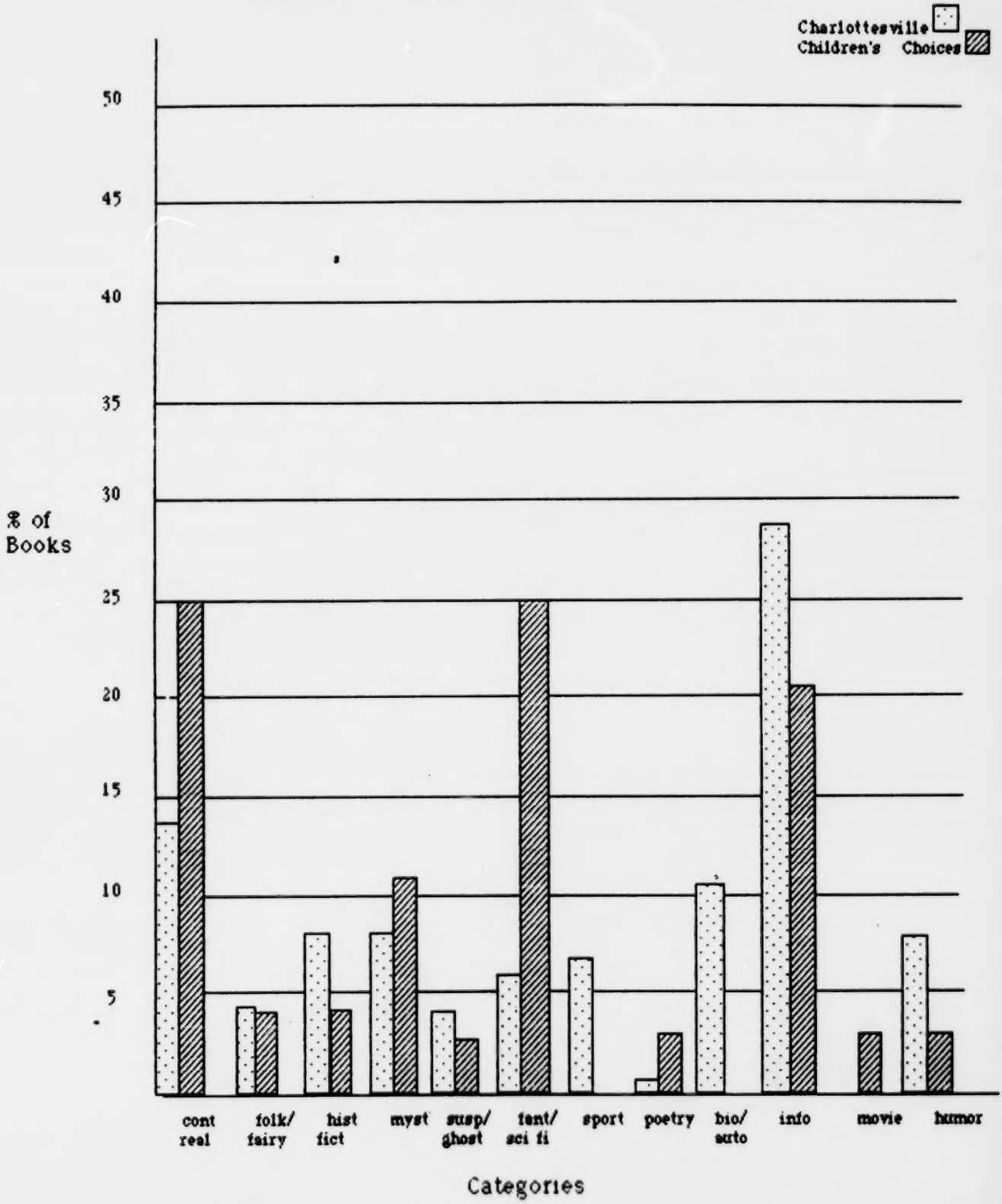


Figure 14: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category Charlottesville 1994 and Children's Choices 1988

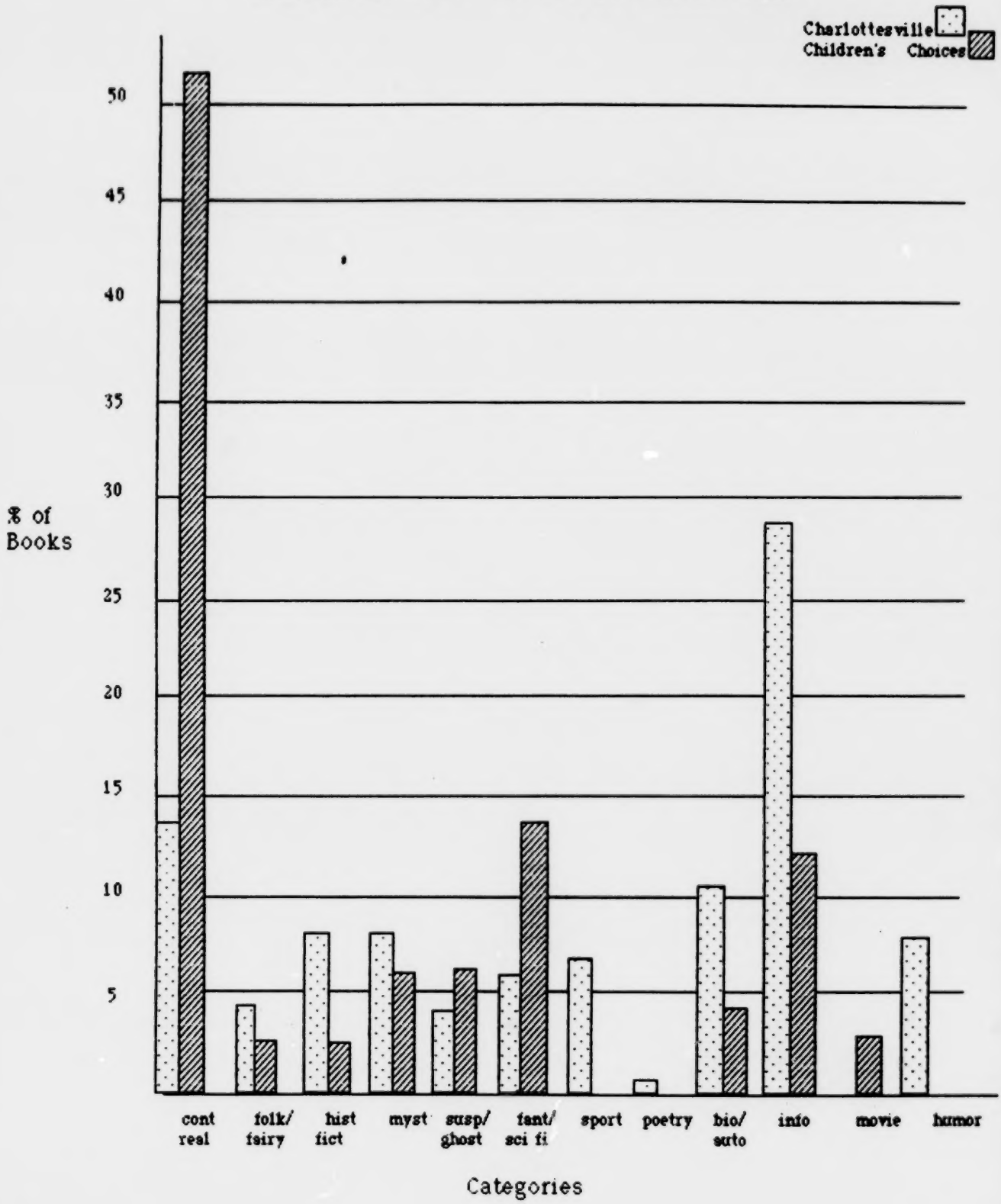


Figure 15: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category
Charlottesville 1994 and Children's Choices 1989

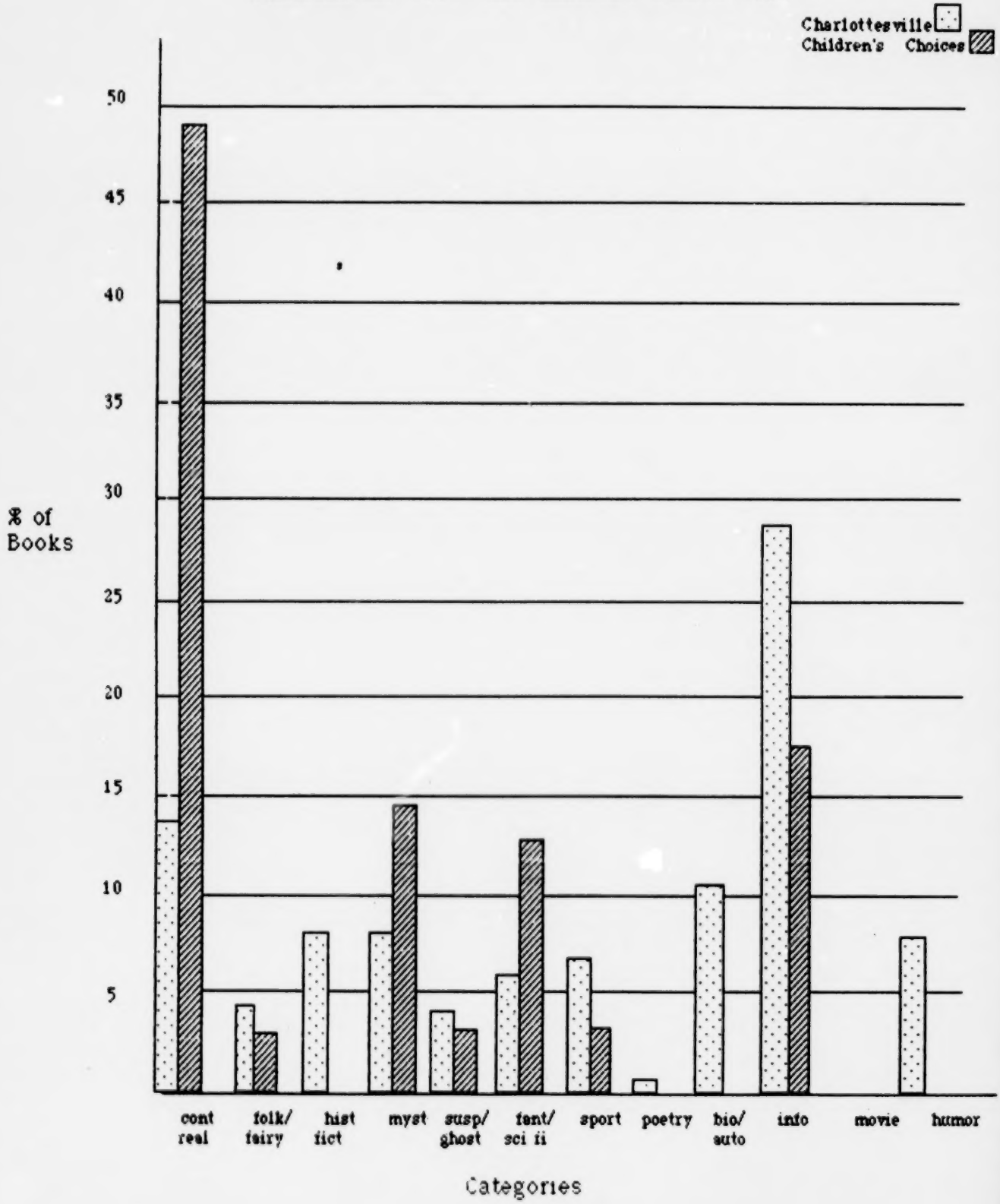


Figure 16: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category
Charlottesville 1994 and Children's Choices 1990

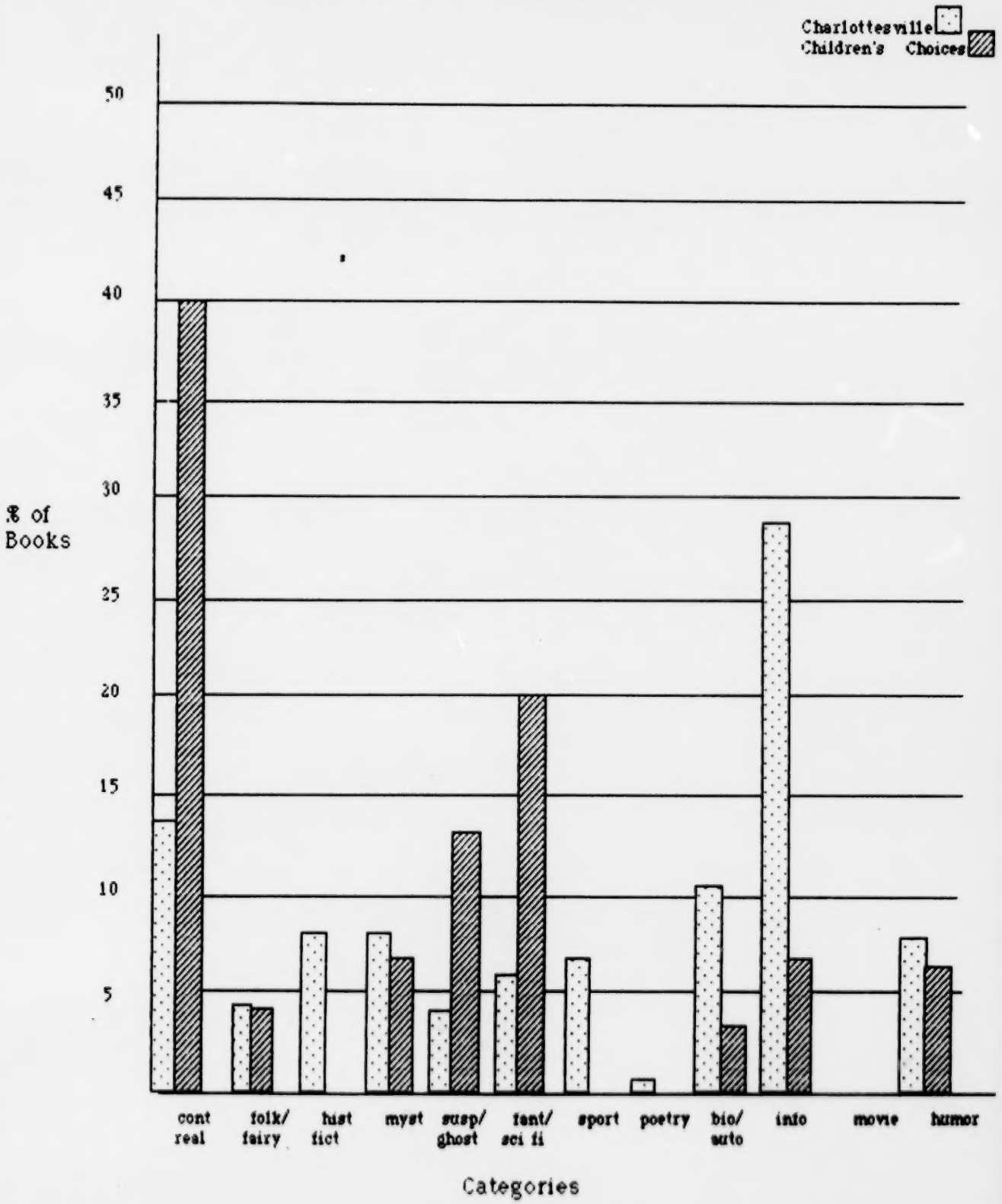


Figure 17: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category
Charlottesville 1994 and Children's Choices 1991

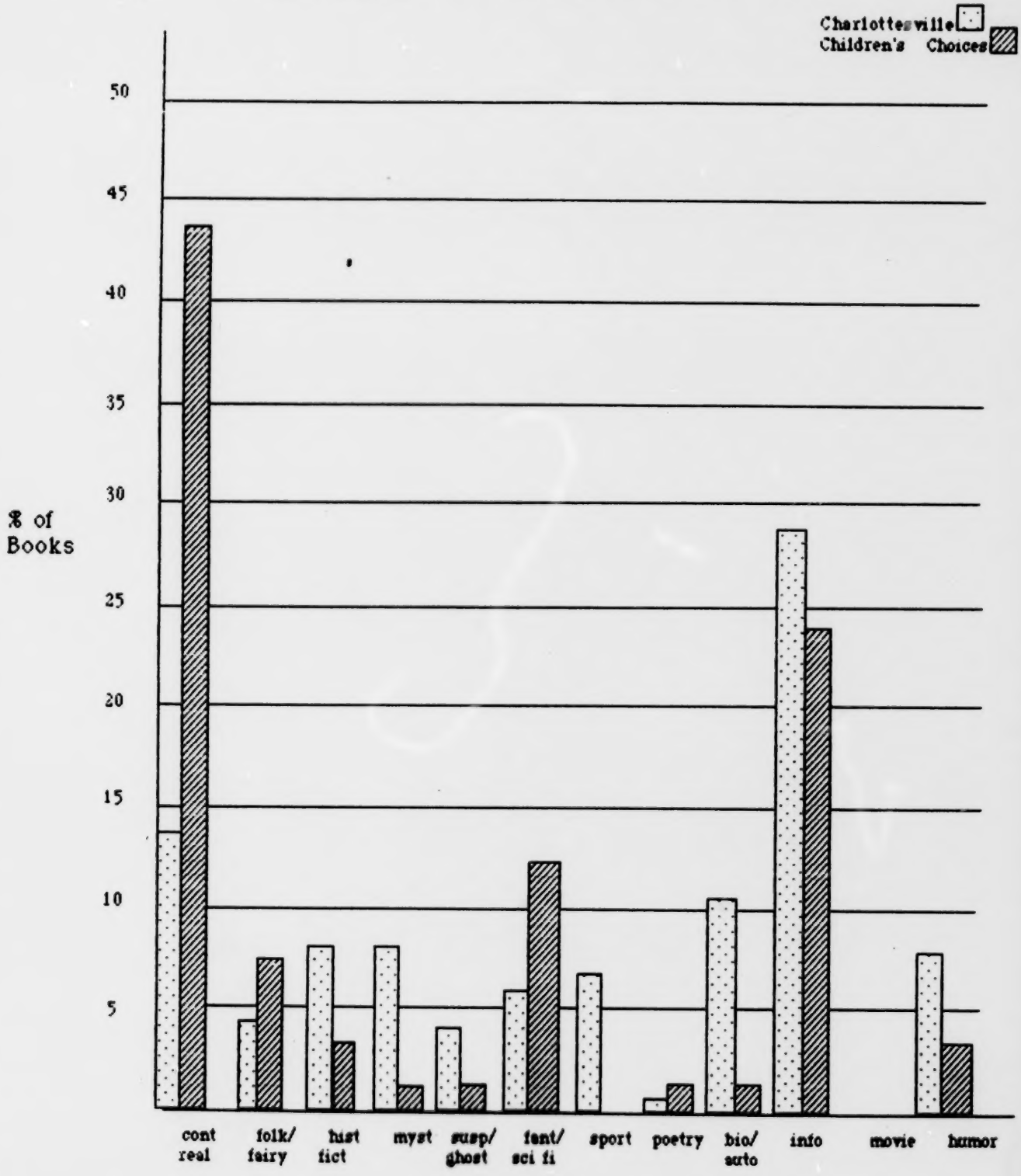


Figure 18: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category Charlottesville 1994 and Children's Choices 1992

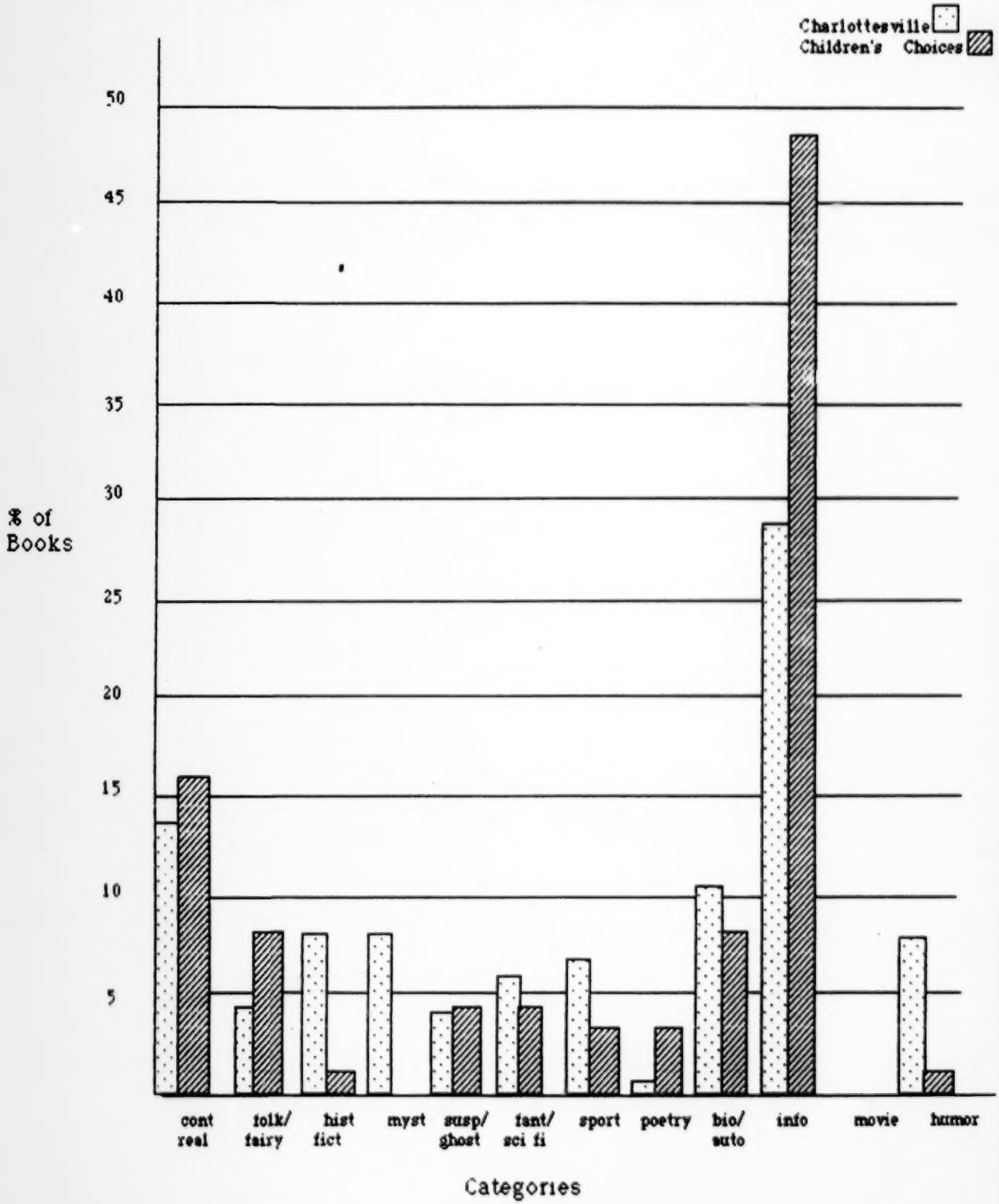


Figure 19: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category Charlottesville 1994 and Children's Choices 1993

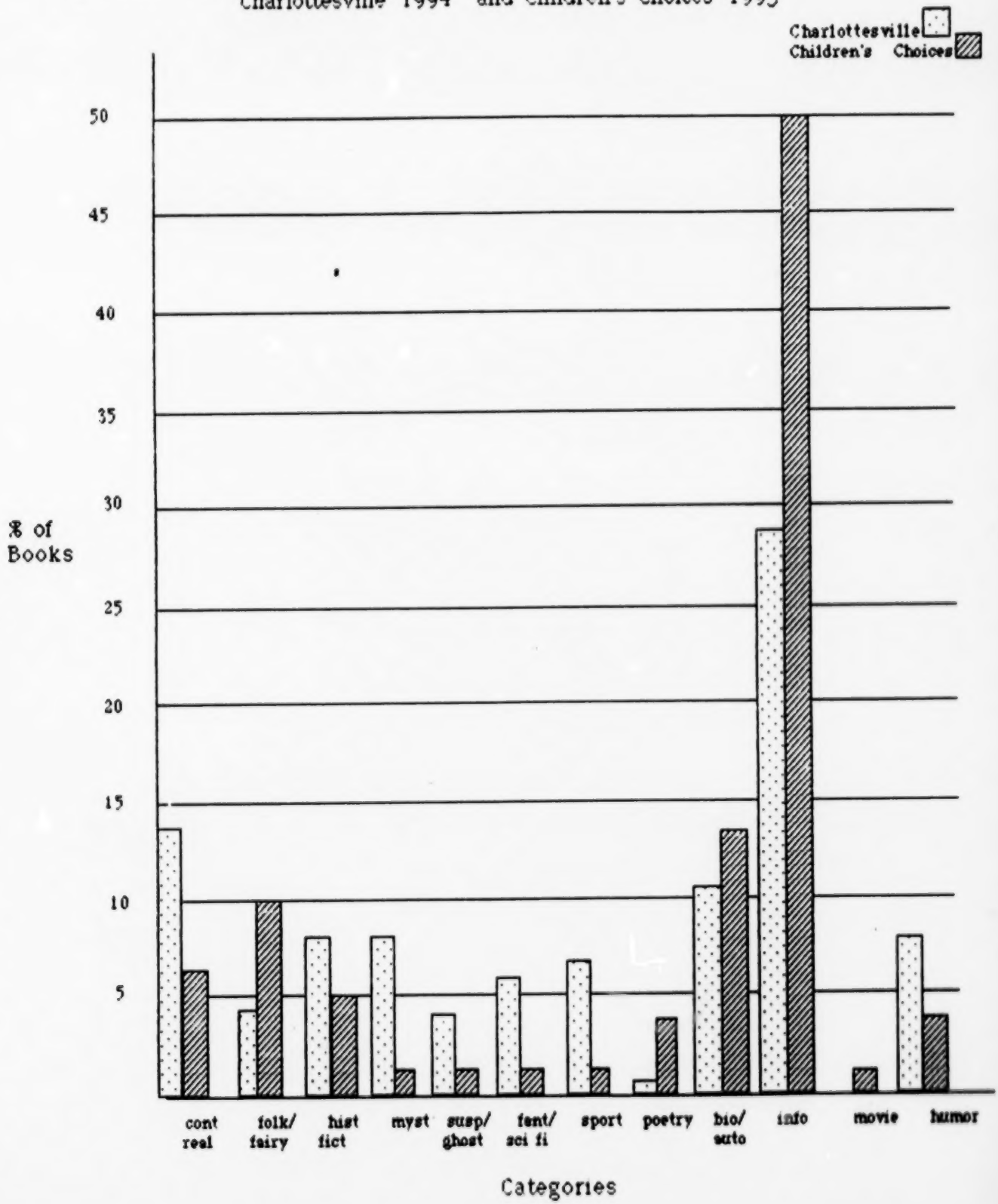
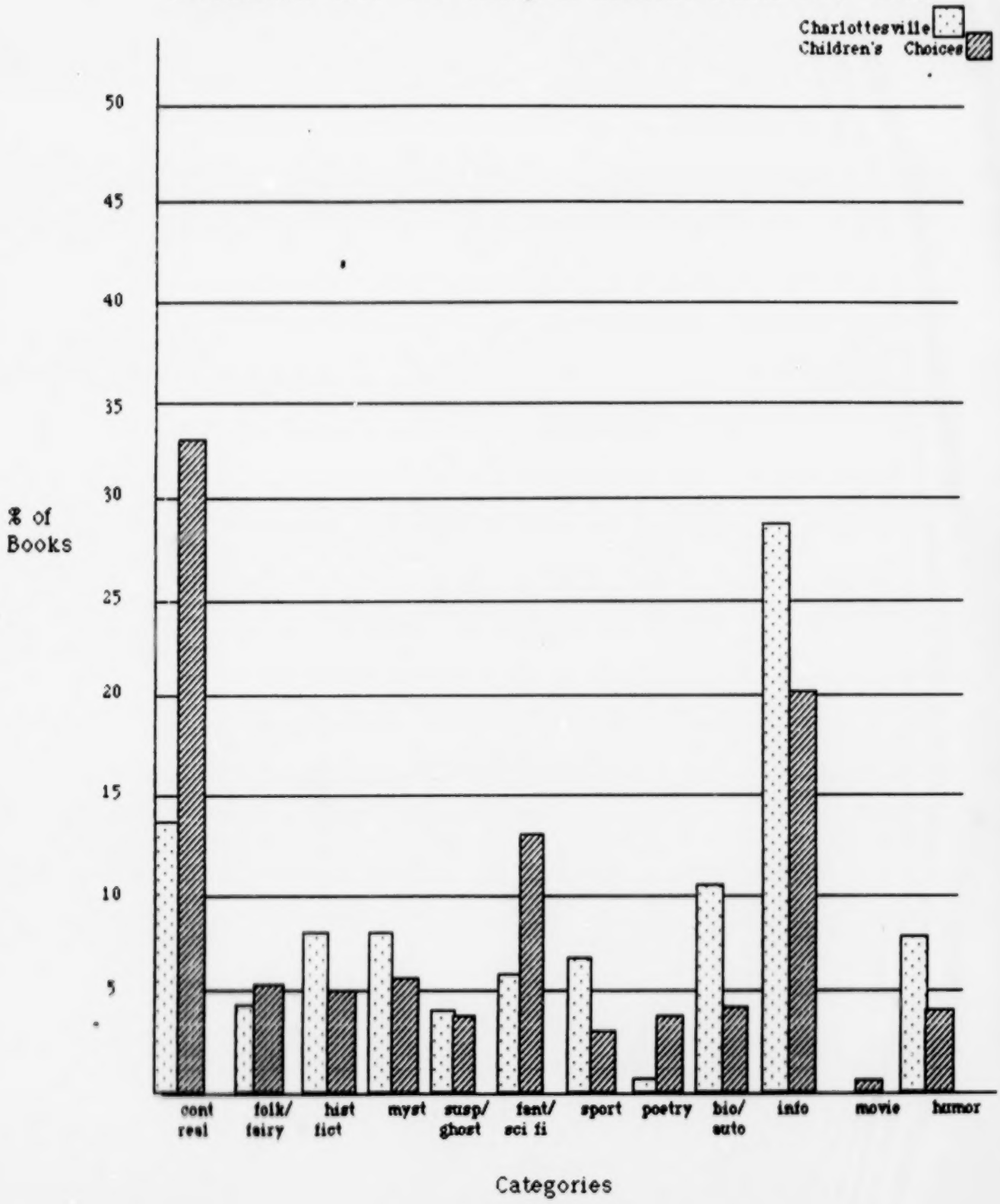


Figure 20: Comparison of Percent of Books Chosen per Category
Charlottesville 1994 and Average of Children's Choices 1975 -1993



In addition to these data, the explanations of Charlottesville area children of why they had selected a particular book or type of book were recorded. The responses were sorted by reason for choosing a book; most fell into three reasons: exciting, learn things, or fun. Table 2 shows examples of some explanations of children who choose books because they are exciting.

Table 2 - Responses of Children Who Choose to Read Books Because They Are Exciting

Historical Fiction

"Stories about history are exciting." (4th grade)

"I like adventures. My favorite book is Kidnapped." (6th grade)

Mystery

"It's exciting when they put the clues together and figure out who did it." (3rd grade)

"I like to pretend I'm the detective. It's exciting trying to figure out the clues and how to det out of dangerous problems." (5th grade)

Fantasy/Science Fiction

"I like to read science fiction because they always have great adventures in outer space." (6th grade)

Suspense/Ghost

"Ghost stories are my favorite because they are scary and exciting. I like to read them when it's nightime - they're even scarier then!" (4th grade)

In Table 3, some examples of responses of children who read a book so they can learn things are presented.

Table 3 - Responses of Children Who Choose to Read Books Because They Learn Things

Information

"My mom reads me an Earth book because the letters are too little. I like it because you can learn lots of different things about the Earth." (3rd grade)

"I like information books because you can learn alot about all kinds of things. Today I got a book now about how plants grow. I want to plant a garden this spring, so I decided to learn about plants first." (4th grade)

"I love horses, and I want to know everything about them!" (4th grade)

"Nonfiction is my favorite. Not like textbooks - those are usually boring. I mean books that are, you know, all about one thing, like cars. You learn alot, but it's still fun to read and not boring." (6th grade)

Biography/Autobiography

"I just finished a biography of Jackie Robinson. It was really good because I got to learn all kinds of stuff about his life . . . I got this book about Joe DiMaggio today. I like reading about old baseball players" (4th grade)

Historical Fiction

"I like history stories because you can learn all about how people used to live, like, a long, long time ago, and it's still fun." (3rd grade)

Table 4 contains a few of the many responses given by children who read certain books or types of books because they are fun to read.

Table 4 - Responses of Children Who Choose to Read Books Because They Are Fun

Humor

"I like funny stories like King Begood in the Bathtub because they make me laugh." (3rd grade)

"I like Amelia Bedelia because it's fun to try to figure out what she will think Mrs. Rogers means." (3rd grade)

Sports

"I love baseball . . . I think it's fun to read books about baseball and about baseball players." (5th grade)

Folk/Fairy Tales

"We studied folk tales at school. I like reading them. It's fun to see how some are almost the same, like Yeh Shen and Cinderella." (3rd grade)

Mystery

"It's really fun to try to figure out the solution to the mystery and guess the bad guy before the detective." (4th grade)

Contemporary Realistic Fiction

"I like reading books about kids my own age. I think it's neat to see, you know, what other kids my age are thinking and doing, even if it's just a story." (6th grade)

"Books like Mickey, Run Away are fun to read because they could really happen. I like to read stories that are realistic." (5th grade)

General

"I love to read. I like all kinds of books." (4th grade)

These results will be discussed in terms of their implications for librarians, teachers, parents, and other adults selecting books for children in the following section.

## DISCUSSION

This section will examine the results presented and use those results to draw conclusions and make inferences about the kinds of literature that children like to read.

An examination of Table 1, which shows the books chosen by the Charlottesville area children as favorites, suggests that nonfiction, informational books are the most frequently read books by the children interviewed. Contemporary realistic fiction is a distant second with fewer than half as many children reporting that they prefer to read this type of book. Biographies and autobiographies, humorous books, historical fiction, mysteries, and fantasy and science fiction are only marginally popular with Charlottesville area children. Folk and fairy tales and suspense and ghost stories are even less popular. Poetry received only one vote, and not one child was reading a book based on a movie.

Converting these numbers into percentages and comparing them to the percent in each category from the Children's Choices lists provides some interesting results. The hypothesis that the Charlottesville children's selections would be more similar to the averages of the Children's Choices lists (Figure 20) than to any one of the annual lists was not confirmed; in fact, none of the Children's Choices lists were similar to the Charlottesville area children's selections across all of the categories. The 1985 Children's Choices list (Figure 11), which had the three categories (fantasy/science

fiction, sports, and poetry) within one percentage point of the Charlottesville selections, was the most similar.

The qualitative data in Tables 2-4 show that children have particular reasons for choosing the books that they read. Only one child reported not knowing why he likes the books he reads. Each of the other children had some reason he or she could give for choosing a certain type of book. The three most common reasons cited by children are as follows: (1) it is exciting, (2) you can learn something, and (3) it is fun. Two of these three reasons refer to the entertainment value of books. However, recall that the Charlottesville area children selected information books more than twice as often as any type of fiction. Thus, the two purposes children seem to have in mind when selecting a book are entertainment and knowledge acquisition.

Parents, teachers, and librarians, as well as any other adult selecting literature for children, should keep these two reasons in mind. It is important not only to know what kinds of books children are reading, but also why they are choosing to read them. Knowing what kinds of literature children enjoy reading and why they enjoy reading it allows adults to help children find books they will enjoy. This knowledge can also be used to help a child expand his or her literary horizons by finding books that are similar to those enjoyed by the child, but are more well written, or that address an unusual topic, or are on the child's reading level.

Discovering what kinds of books children like and why they like them can be as simple as observing what a single child selects to read and asking why he or she likes it, or as complicated as surveying an entire school or community. Whether selecting children's literature for one child,

a school, or a community, it is important for adults to remember to ask children what they like to read and why they enjoy reading it.

Literacy is a major problem in this country. As the level of technology used in even lower level jobs increases, people will need to be even more literate than at any time in the past. However, children are spending less time reading and more time in front of the television. Reading is the best way to improve literacy; while reading, vocabulary is increased, and decoding skills and comprehension are practiced. One of the easiest ways for a concerned adult to help a child want to read more is to discover books that relate to the child's interests. Often once a child discover how much can be learned from books, and how entertaining good books can be, he or she has a good chance of becoming not only a better reader, but also a lifelong reader.

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